Interview with Rebecca Burrum Matlock

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Program
Foreign Service Spouse Series

REBECCA BURRUM MATLOCK

Interviewed by: Patricia Squire

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Q: This is Pat Squire. I am sitting here in Spaso House in Moscow beginning an interview with Rebecca Matlock, the wife of our Ambassador to the USSR, Jack Matlock. There would be great interest in an interview with almost any lady in Mrs. Matlock's position at this time in history, but Rebecca Matlock is of very special interest. She came here first as the wife of a junior officer and she came back twice later on. She has managed, at least from the point of view of an onlooker, to combine being a hardworking and successful Foreign Service spouse in the old-fashioned traditional sense with building up a career of her own. All this while raising what again appear to be five successful, well-adjusted children.

Before I go on, I want to insert that this is January 11, 1990. And I am interested in an over-all picture of Mrs. Matlock's life in the Foreign Service, but also am very much interested in how she has managed to do so much. We will begin with a brief biographical background. Where were you born and raised?

MATLOCK: I was born in the state of Tennessee and I lived in Tennessee until I went to university in North Carolina in 1946. I went to Duke University where I met Jack Matlock. We were married while we were still undergraduates and then went on to New York where we studied together at Columbia University. Then we went to Dartmouth College where he

taught Russian language and literature and we produced three children. Then we joined the Foreign Service and were in Washington for two years and went off to Vienna. And Vienna is, I think, the place where our relevant Foreign Service experience began.

Q: That was your first post?

MATLOCK: That was our first post.

Q: All right. Do you want to tell me a little bit about how you started off in Vienna as a brand-new Foreign Service wife?

MATLOCK: Yes, but I think you might find it more interesting how I started out as a Foreign Service wife in Washington, okay?

Q: All right, yes.

MATLOCK: The first question that was asked me was by the wife of an officer who had been here in Moscow. Her husband was the head of the research division where my husband worked when he first came into the Foreign Service. She said, “Why do you think you'd like the Foreign Service?” And I thought up some of the stock answers. And then finally she said, “Well you know when you're in Spaso House, your cigarette will be lit in order of your husband's rank.” Well that was a conversation stopper.

Q: She knew you were headed for Spaso House someday!

MATLOCK: (laughs) So I said, “Well since I don't smoke, I think that won't be a real problem.” But we spent two years in Washington which we enjoyed very much. I think, looking back, that the thing that is most meaningful to me was the relationship I was able to develop with spouses of other Foreign Service officers in that context.

When we had been in Hanover, [N.H.] I had been a member of a reading group and enjoyed it and missed it. So what we did was organize ourselves, people who were in my

husband's Foreign Service class, into a ladies' club. And most of us had small children. We left our husbands looking after the children, and once a month we would get together. And what we decided to read was material - contemporary material - written by authors of the countries to which we thought we might be assigned. So that was a little group that meant a lot to me and everywhere else I went, I organized a similar reading group.

Q: And these ladies, probably still many of them, are important to you today.

MATLOCK: Oh absolutely, yes, yes, of course.

Q: Have you anything you'd like to say about Vienna?

MATLOCK: Oh Vienna was quite an experience for me. I think that since we are trying to do an anecdotal history, that you might like to hear a little about our experience in getting to Vienna. We crossed on the S.S. United States back in the days when one could travel first class with one's family, and we enjoyed that very much. And when we got to Le Havre, my husband said, “Now we can send on some of our suitcases and trunks straight to Vienna since we are driving.”

So I blithely sent away everything including the suitcases that had the diapers for the twins. This was before the days of disposable diapers anywhere except in the United States. It took the trunks and suitcases at least 6 weeks to arrive in Vienna. So our daily task was to go to drug stores and try to get the paper diapers they sold for invalids. Of course we would buy their whole supply and it would take them another week to get supplied again. That was just my little introduction into the differences that one finds living abroad from living at home.

Q: Did you live in a hotel with these three small children?

MATLOCK: We lived in a hotel for three months and a day. And the reason I know we lived there for three months and a day was because the housing allowance ran out after

three months. So we had to pay ourselves for that day and that knocked a hole in the budget.

Q: Anything else that you'd like to say about Vienna before we go on?

MATLOCK: Well back in Vienna one thing that was difficult to do and I look back on with pleasure - and I feel that it's something that was important. We were expected to make formal calls. And this was not easy to do with three young children in a hotel room - to leave them and go off and call on the wives of the senior men at the Embassy. But it did mean that we got to know the people well and personally. And this is something that I've always felt was important. Not turning down a corner and writing down the little initials on a card, but actually a face-to-face conversation.

So from the time my husband first had the responsibility of being Head of Mission (on Zanzibar) I've always let it be known that I would be delighted to meet with any of the spouses and children who wanted to take the time to come and have tea with me in the afternoon.

Q: Do they do it?

MATLOCK: They do it, many of them. But it's no longer obligatory.

Q: No, no, but still.

MATLOCK: Back in Vienna you had to. And the terrible thing was they would return the calls. There was a certain period in the afternoon when the calling could be done. I remember once using Clorox in the bathtub to wash the clothing for our two two-year olds and our four-year old and then having Mrs. Tapley Bennett, the wife of the Political Counselor, wearing furs with a long string of pearls, open the door. (laughs) There I was with a strange smell coming out of the bathroom of the hotel room. It was terribly embarrassing.

Q: But she was very nice. She would have loved that.

MATLOCK: Oh she was charming. She had kids too, including twins I believe, so we laughed about that for years.

Q: She would appreciate that. Where did you go after Vienna?

MATLOCK: After Vienna we went to Germany. Jack had of course taught Russian for several years, but back in those days, and it might still be the case, it was very difficult to get an appointment to the Soviet Union if the State Department had not put money and time into your training. I think partially it justifies the expenses of training. So we had a wonderful year in Oberammergau. Actually we lived in Garmisch Partenkirchen. He went to Oberammergau every day on a bus. That's where he attended Russian language school at the U.S. Army Detachment “R.”

Q: What year was this?

MATLOCK: That was in 1960-61.

Q: And then from there?

MATLOCK: We didn't take home leave after being in Vienna. We went on home leave after our experience in Oberammergau. When we moved to Germany the children by then were all speaking German which was nice because we could put them in German schools there. Our older child was in first grade in Garmisch and the twins were in kindergarten.

We found that with our little boy, our son Hugh, that there was kind of a strange pattern to his language. He was five and spoke English perfectly well. But when he got to the United States, he had a very, very strange, strained language. And people would look at him oddly. And I began to realize that it was because everyday of their lives they had spoken German in the morning and English in the afternoon. When they were in kindergarten,

the kindergarten was in German, and with the nanny in Vienna they had been required to speak German. So when he was, out of necessity, speaking English in America, what he was doing in the morning waplaying with the language, and putting English into German word order. And then in the afternoon, he spoke normally.

Q: Talking about these children of yours. They started off. Did they learn many languages? Did they stay with you on post? Did they go to boarding school subsequently?

MATLOCK: Yes. Fortunately they've inherited their father's ability with languages which I envy very much. They all do speak Russian, yes. And most of them speak German because we had German-speaking governesses. They have all studied Swahili and some have studied French.

Q: They started off with a foreign language. I think we find that happens with Foreign Service children. Well did you come here after this experience in Oberammergau?

MATLOCK: Yes, we came here. I managed to get pregnant while I was in the States. I was in Florida and we were ready to come to Moscow. You can imagine my dilemma there! (laughs) But I went to Lane Bryant where they make clothes for ladies who are a little bit larger than other ladies, sweaters and all kinds of things which did very nicely for Moscow. And then I had about three hours in New York and I dashed off to Saks Fifth Avenue and went waddling onto the ship loaded with two shopping bags full of maternity clothes for Moscow. Those served me well because I had not one, but two children.

Q: Here. Where did you have ... ?

MATLOCK: Well David was born in Helsinki, I went to Helsinki with David, and since by then the twins were six, I wanted him to have a little brother right away. Well Joe came a month early so he was born here in Moscow. He is our Moscow child.

Q: Do you care to comment on that at all?

MATLOCK: Well certainly. I wrote up the experience as I usually do when something is extraordinary. It was required reading for many years for people coming to Moscow to find out what it's like to have a child in a Soviet hospital. It's not your usual experience.

Q: No. Whereas I gather it's very nice to have one in Helsinki?

MATLOCK: Yes.

Q: I notice you have a rug over here. I want you to talk about your rugs. Did this start here because of your. . .

MATLOCK: The one on the floor is a gift from Martha Hydler and her husband Elton in Fort Worth, TexaThey've been very generous to us here in Spaso House. They've given us a desk, the large desk here, the 18th century English secretary downstairs, the grandfather's clock, and even thmirror here. As furnishings for Spaso House, antiques that one could buy in this country but not export. So it's perfect for us and we're delighted.

But as far as my own rug which you see behind you there, that is one that I'm making for a museum out in Siberia. I had an exhibition last year of my rugs in Ulan Ude and they asked me if I would sell one. So I said, “I don't sell my rugs.” And then I heard myself saying, “But I will make one for you.” Well since making one of these rugs takes about a year, I have been working at it for quite a while. But it's a hobby I've had for many years.

I saw my first rya in Finland in 1961 when we were on our way to Moscow. I had no idea that you could make them without using a loom. And so it was a few years before I discovered it's possible to do so. And Beppy De Pree whose husband was in Africa with us, in Ghana, is Swedish, or was Swedish, and she was making one on a card table. And so then I learned that you can buy the backing already woven and then you can make the rug.

So since then I've always had one going and I've had exhibitions in the United States and Czechoslovakia. As a matter of fact one of my rugs took first place when I exhibited some of them at the Martin Luther King Library in Washington. I had an exhibit in Tchaikovsky Hall here when Van Cliburn played. There will be an opening for the exhibition of my rugs this month at the Tretiakov Gallery here in Moscow.

Q: This is very exciting. Well your whole - we're jumping around, but your whole involvement with Soviet culture has become so rich through the years.

MATLOCK: Well, when we were undergraduates at Duke, we studied Russian history and Russian literature with very fine professors. And then Jack went on to the Russian Institute at Columbia and I did comparative literature at Columbia at the same time. I didn't really start studying the Russian language formally until we were in Oberammergau and I sort of traded lessons in English and Russian with someone who knew the language well. That didn't work terribly well. I think you must either do one or the other.

So when I came to the Soviet Union I started studying Russian. I studied it very, very seriously, but I soon began to feel that the Soviet teachers were under instructions to take up as much time as possible, but see that we learn absolutely nothing of practical use. So I didn't progress very far. I guess I learned more than I thought I did at that point.

But then when we were back in Washington and Jack was Head of the Russian Desk, I had permission to study at the Foreign Service Institute and took the course that the Foreign Service officers take. That's ten months full-time. From that time I've been able to do pretty well. Although I found when I came here in 1974, the second time, after eleven years, that I could talk about laying a cable on the seabed floor but I didn't know how to ask the maid to cut off the lights. You know. Very little practical, but the infrastructure for the grammar was there.

Q: Well do you find it easier now that there is much more free association with the Russians? That you're speaking a lot more than you were in the old days?

MATLOCK: Well, we've been fortunate the times we've been in the Soviet Union. We've been here for the up times. During the thaw there was lots of contact then. Our best friends now are the friends we made then as young people here. We were here for detente, the four years of detente where you would see someone and they'd say, “Well why haven't you had me over?” Very different from the down times.

And in '81 we had enough friends that when Jack became the charg# when Ambassador Watson left and before Ambassador Hartman came, we were here for ten months. During that time we had an infrastructure of friends which made a lot of difference. Then again, there was a sea change in the relationship just about the time we arrived this time which was very fortunate. We have not experienced the down times that you read about and hear about in the U.S.-Soviet relationships personally.

Q: Oh dear. Well I did. All right. So you were first here in 1961 and the Ambassador was a Vice Consul then. So you started. . .

MATLOCK: Yes, he was the low man on the totem pole in the Consular Section. The most interesting case we had at that point was a young man who had come to live in the Soviet Union. He married here and had a child, a very young child. And he decided that he was going to go back to America. He came in to get a repatriation loan and to ask for a visa for his wife. Well this young man's name was Lee Harvey Oswald.

Q: My goodness.

MATLOCK: I heard quite a lot about him since Jack was in the Consular Section when this negotiation was going on, because he didn't have any money, he could get a repatriation loan. Now I think the tragedy is the fact that he did not return after he came to the Consulate a few years earlier to renounce his American citizenship. And in cases like this,

the Consul suggests a person think about it for at least 24 hours and then come back. Well he didn't come back, so he was still an American citizen. If he had come back and done what he had originally wanted to do which was renounce his citizenship, then he would not have had the opportunity to kill President Kennedy.

Q: He wouldn't have been able to go.

MATLOCK: That's right. The story was an interesting one. I remember going and sitting in the Consular Section to see this man and his wife and his child when they came in to have her visa approved, to have her visa issued. (Jack as the junior officer was given this consular case.) So I sat there and pretended I was an applicant so I could observe them. And I remember how angry he was when my husband said that he would have to see his wife privately. He was furious. He said, “No, no, she can't speak English. You can't see her privately.” So Jack said, “Well, I speak Russian.” He said, “You can't see her privately anyway.” And so my husband told him that without an interview she wouldn't get a visa.

So finally he let her disappear with my husband and he was left with the child who was swaddled on a board. He was obviously uncomfortable with the child. And he paced back and forth, back and forth while he was waiting for her to get out. She was given the visa and as we all know, he went to the United States and then he killed President Kennedy.

Q: Fascinating. Anything else happen? I mean that was earth-shattering in that period.

MATLOCK: Well a curtain came down when, after a year, he went into the Political Section. In the Political Section then, as now, people worked very, very long hours. I remember we were preparing for a Halloween party at the dacha out of town. We all had our costumes. It was going to be a great party. And on the afternoon of the day the party was going to be, the husbands started calling in and saying that they couldn't make it, including my husband. And we, the wives, were getting more and more angry. We thought

that they just didn't want to get dressed in their silly costumes and drive out there. Well it was the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Q: Oh dear. So you sat on this side watching that.

MATLOCK: That's right. As a matter of fact, Dick Davies who was later Ambassador for six years to Poland, and Herb Okun who is an Ambassador to the United Nations and earlier was Ambassador to East Germany - the three of them - it was before the days that we had immediate translation of the hot line - they would divide the letters that came in from Khrushchev into three parts and do the translation into English. They saw what was going on before the President did, then they transmitted it to get it out.

Q: Fascinating.

MATLOCK: But there was not the terror here that there was in the United States. Because we didn't know until afterwards about those planes sitting on the runway waiting to take off for Cuba and all the preparations for the possibility of war. The Soviets knew nothing at all.

Q: So it was probably the location of the Soviet ships that we were. . .

MATLOCK: And Ambassador Kohler had just arrived. So Ambassador Thompson who had just left was the key person who was in the Department. And he along with the staff here who knew him and had worked with him were the ones who tried to keep this on a level that could be handled.

Q: That's fascinating. You'll have to think of more things like this to tell us. When you left here that time, where did you go?

MATLOCK: We went to Africa. We were in Africa for seven years. And we enjoyed Africa. We really had a wonderful time. We had let it be known that we'd like to go to a place where Soviet relationship was important. We went to Ghana where Kwame Nkrumah was in charge. The Soviets were making a very, very strong effort there. It was always

interesting to people to see the Soviet Ambassador and this young man in the American Embassy stroll and talk in Russian. (laughs)

I think some people were a little frightened of this. After about a year and a half Nkrumah was toppled. I should say that our house was very close to the airport. One day we - our servants - heard that the Russians were coming. They started running, running away and told us that we should evacuate the area. So I woke up the kids and put them all in the car and we went driving over to the other part of town. The whole city was just full of people - terrified people running away from the airport. They'd all heard the Russians were coming.

Well what it was was that the Russians had been told they had to leave. They were going to be evacuated so they were coming to the airport to be flown out of the country. But the whole town ran away because someone overheard a conversation at the airport and they heard that the area must be cleared because the Russians were coming. They were terrified! (laughs)

Q: They were being invaded. When you left Ghana where did you go?

MATLOCK: Well we liked Africa so we wanted another African post. We were not ready to go back to Washington and we were not ready to go back to the Soviet Union. So we got an absolutely marvelous post. We went to Zanzibar. And Zanzibar of course is a very, very special place. But at that particular moment it was also very much concerned with not only the Russians, but the Chinese and the East Germans. So we lived between the Chinese and East Germans on Zanzibar.

And one of the more touching incidents was - our children spoke German - when they tried to talk with the German children just across the fence. And of course the East German teachers wouldn't let them communicate. It was really very sad to try to explain to very young children why it is you can't talk to children who share your language.

Q: And where did they go to school there?

MATLOCK: The older children went back to the United States to school. The two boys stayed with my parents and our daughter stayed with Jack's mother in Florida. The two younger ones were in a Swahili school in the mornings. David made better grades in Swahili than he did in English which pleased us. (laughs)

And then in the afternoon we had a tutor for them who used the Calvert System. And this was just wonderful. Particularly for David who was six. After two years on Zanzibar with the Calvert System, in Dar es Salaam when he went into a real school for the first time, he was put in fourth grade because he was so far ahead of the third graders. Of course he was a bright little boy, but it was because of the Calvert System.

The teacher the first year [in Zanzibar] was a young American woman who stayed with us as a teacher. The second year we had a woman who was Ceylonese who had taught in Canada and her husband was out working in a technical school which the AID program had helped to fund in Zanzibar. So she taught our two children and two of her children, so she had four children in two classes.

Q: So there wasn't a school?

MATLOCK: Well there was a Swahili school in Zanzibar.

Q: Even today?

MATLOCK: Yes certainly.

Q: And then after Zanzibar?

MATLOCK: After that we went to Dar es Salaam which of course is the capital of Tanzania. And Jack was charg# after Ambassador Burns left and before Ambassador Ross arrived. And we were there for a year.

Q: Before?

MATLOCK: Going back to the State Department finally.

Q: You were out a long time.

MATLOCK: Eleven years.

Q: All right. And how long were you in Washington and what did he do?

MATLOCK: I think it was for about four years that Jack was head of the Russian Desk. He did spend one year in the Senior Seminar before he was at the State Department.

Q: Well you have a business. Did that start at this time? When did this start?

MATLOCK: Oh no. That started much later. That was after we had been . .

Q: Back here [Moscow].

MATLOCK: Back here. He had been here as charg#. Then he'd been Ambassador to Prague. While he was the Ambassador to Prague, he was also very quietly advising the President and the National Security Council on Soviet affairs. And then after the KAL affair and after some enterprising fellow at the New York Times found out he was doing this and did a front page story, then he left Prague and went full-time on the National Security Council as the President's Advisor on European Affairs. But he of course spent most of his time on Soviet affairs and other people took other parts. But - I've forgotten what your question was.

Q: Oh, about your business.

MATLOCK: Oh about my business. Now, I found myself in a situation. All the kids were through college. They were not living at home. Jack was disappearing for a 7:30 meeting

every morning and he would do well to come home at night by 9:30. You know how it was. So I felt for the first time in my life that I could do what I pleased instead of what I had to. I had a friend who had had experience with a family business. And she said, “Let's go into business.” And so with her expertise and my time, we started our firm.

Q: And do you want to talk a little about that?

MATLOCK: Sure, I'd be glad to. It's called International Designers Corporation. And basically we represents artists from countries other than the United States. Certainly not countries where we are located - we don't represent any Soviet artists, for example - in the United States for commissions. We have representatives across the country. We don't make a lot of money, but we have a lot of fun trying.

Q: So you have your rugs, you have this, and you are well known as a photographer and have an exhibit going on here now in the Soviet Union.

MATLOCK: Yes, this is my fourth exhibit here in Moscow and I'm slated for photo exhibitions in Leningrad and Vladivostok, as well as Tbilisi, Georgia, and Ulan Ude in Siberia.

These came about as a bit of a fluke. Jack was asked to speak at the auditorium of the cinematographers' union. They decided since they had a very large area outside the lecture hall that it would be rather nice to have several American exhibits there. But they didn't explain that to me. So they asked me if I would exhibit my rugs. And I said, “Well I'll be glad to, but would you be interested in the photographs instead? They tell more about America than rugs. They're Scandinavian.” And they said, “Certainly.”

And then I found out that they were not only talking to me, but they were talking to a lot of other people about it. It was turning into a bit of a bazaar. Nothing to be sold, but just kind of a bazaar-sort of presentation with lots of different aspects of crafts that were American. So I decided that my photographs really didn't belong in that milieu. When I had done

shows, I'd either been with one person or I'd just been alone. And I just didn't think this was appropriate.

So they said, “Well, would you do another show all by yourself?” and so when they had an international film festival, they asked me to put up some of my photographs. I did a show for them and it was covered by television. The Photojournalists' Union and a number of other people saw the photos. And from that I've gotten many invitations to show them. But the most impressive one I think was when they said that there were 50,000 people who came to see it here in Moscow. I had a whole floor of the Photojournalists' Union and in that case there was everything that I had that had been enlarged. The one that is up right now is just people. For the Writers' Union I thought that writers write about people, and that would be interesting.

Q: Well didn't you do an interview recently with the Writers' Union?

MATLOCK: Yes I did. I had an interview with the Writers' Union just this week actually. That was in the context of an organization within the organization. The women have decided to have their own organization within the Writers' Union. And they invited me to come and observe the first meeting. This nice young lady from the Literary Gazette asked my opinion on lots of things and then she wrote it up as an interview.

But that's one of many publications that I've been getting in recently. Just this week a weekly magazine which is similar to Time Magazine carried an article including an interview with me. Their lead was really quite amusing. You know here in the Soviet Union, the children are not encouraged to do odd jobs to earn money. So her lead was about how Jack Matlock, when he wanted pocket money when he was in high school, photographed babies and weddings and had a camera called a Speed Graphic which he sold so we could afford to go on our honeymoon. So that was her lead. And then she went into how I developed my skill with photography.

And even included, I believe, the story about my first exhibition which you will find interesting, and which I think Foreign Service people will. I entered a contest at the State Department. You know that every year they have this art contest for employees and dependents. And my photo “Fishing Out” which I had made in Czechoslovakia was chosen for a prize. And as a result of that, the Foreign Service Club asked me to do an exhibition for the library there. I did and I used things which fit into my special concept which I call “black and white and color.” I use color film, but I make silhouettes and choose my subjects so that they basically look black and white, but there's always a little bit of color to show that it really is a color photograph. And that exhibition was so popular that they didn't let me take it down for over a year.

And then when some of the ladies saw that I could handle a camera, they asked me to photograph the State Department Book Fair. The first thing that I was asked to do was to photograph Mrs. Patterson who had made a contribution to the fund. So I photographed her and others of my friends, and then for several years my photographs appeared in the AAFSW Journal because I was there on the spot to do that first assignment. And I had never used black and white film, not since I was a teenager during the War. So I remember going up to Middlebury, Vermont for a conference on Soviet-American affairs, where I shot off a 36-exposure roll with black and white film to practice to see if I could do it right. As it turned out, I was so excited I forgot to put the film in! (laughs) So I was very lucky with Mrs. Patterson that she came out all right because she was the first.

Q: Well she will be interested to hear that I am doing an interview with you at this time because she has been so supportive. Maybe I will just pause for a moment.

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Q: Have you done other photographic exhibits in the United States?

MATLOCK: Well yes. As a result of the Foreign Service Club exhibition, I have been asked to do numerous photography exhibitions. I have had two in New York, one at Columbia University, one on architecture, and then another on architecture at the Republican Women's Club when I was asked to speak there in New York. Those were two New York shows. When I photographed artists in Czechoslovakia in their studios, I photographed their work. A friend who is really my mentor as far as photography is concerned, Donald Schomacker, who has been my friend from the time we were in the fourth grade, came to Czechoslovakia and made some superb photographs. We had a joint exhibition around the country in most of the Ivy League colleges and out in Seattle and many other places. What I was doing was showing contemporary art in Czechoslovakia using my slides in the context of the gallery showing of his photographs which were augmented by mine, when he wasn't able to get to certain places.

Q: In Czechoslovakia?

MATLOCK: In Czechoslovakia. I had pretty much copied his techniques. There are very seldom people in my photographs. I either do photographs of people or I do photographs of places. And our concept of what we want to do and how we want to do it is so close that it's difficult to tell the difference between his work and mine. But basically my photo shows were in conjunction with his in showing the art of Czechoslovakia. Now as far as my firm is concerned, I use photographs a great deal, both slides and prints. So it's a hobby that's a serious hobby, and I've sold quite a few photographs in different situations, but I don't go out of my way to find a market.

Q: You say this is a hobby, but this is something you have been able to do along with being a Foreign Service wife and a job.

MATLOCK: Well I think the great advantage to being a Foreign Service spouse is that you do have free time to find your own interests. You can learn a language. I remember here when I first called on Mrs. Jane Thompson, and she was talking with me about the

various possibilities. She said, “There's this wonderful language to learn.” And she's right. If you really get involved in a country where you are, you have to learn the language. To learn about the crafts and art and people, the possibilities as a spouse are greater than for people who are working in the Embassy full-time.

Q: Yes. How do you feel with so many wives working today in tandem couples? Do you feel they lose out on this side of their experience?

MATLOCK: Oh I think the situation now is so very different for economic reasons that young women who have children coming along for the university do not have the option. Not the option that you and I had. And I'm sorry they don't. There are a few who choose to take a few years off. But in general it's just a very different world. And I think that the fact of being able to be a tandem couple is quite extraordinary. Of course your daughter and her husband are a wonderful example of that. But I think that a lot of people who are tandem couples have to have a nanny for themselves rather than for the children. And sometimes they wait to have the children a little later or in situations that are more comfortable for them. So it's a real trade-off.

I think that our generation really had wonderful luxuries. But we didn't have the satisfaction of a job well-done and all of the acclaim that goes with being officers ourselves and having our own identity, which of course is something we miss. And if we should suddenly find ourselves cast aside, then we have a real problem. We don't have a job description, history, I mean, and it could well be difficult for us.

That's why, when I've been in Washington in the last few years, I have spent a good bit of time in lobbying on behalf of the - as chairman for the AAFSW Legislative Liaison - lobbying on the Hill for Foreign Service women. In three categories. One, the women who have been widowed or divorced before the 1980 period when there was some relief for that. There is now legislation which helps these people to some extent. It is very difficult for them and their families.And also on behalf of families who will find themselves in some

sort of terrorist situation. I feel very strongly that the State Department should design, and it should be funding, some kind of system for taking care of this without having, whenever there is a case, having to react. And then the third thing, which I feel very, very strongly about, is the concept - it doesn't have to have that name, but the concept of the Foreign Service Associates. Where the spouses, be they male or female, can have the opportunity of using, at post, their skills, be paid for them, and have job histories, and be people in their own right rather than appendages to their spouses which is of course how people thought of us back in the old days. (laughs)

Q: Well the legislation that we've been trying to get through, or AAFSW has been trying to get through, on paying the spouse of the ambassador for the job she does. You are supporting that then?

MATLOCK: I do not want to lobby for that because from the time I've been lobbying for spouses, my husband has been an ambassador, chief of mission. That I think will not come in my time certainly. I think it would be inappropriate for those of us who would benefit to do it. I think the important thing is to lobby for the younger women who are beginning now or in mid-career having an option of their own. And then I think it would become very obvious when this happens that the wife of the Chief of Mission works from dawn until past midnight everyday, that they really do not have very much time of their own, and that whether they like it or not, they are public figures. I don't mind it, I enjoy it, but if I didn't, then it would be very, very difficult. And I think that's the reason why the divorce rate in the Foreign Service is almost as high as it is in the general public - around 50%.

Q: Really? This is very interesting. (pause) But you would lobby for a wife in the Foreign Service being able to build up a resume that she could use?

MATLOCK: Oh absolutely yes. I think it's too bad if they're paid very low salaries that have no relationship to their skills. Here in Moscow now we're in the extraordinary position of it

being possible for everyone to work who really chooses to, just because we of course lost all of the local employees. This is a difficult post in many respects. I do feel very strongly that there should be the option of a spouse working if she chooses to do something that relates to her skills, including special projects that would be helpful.

Q: How do you feel about the allowances that are paid women to stay at home and further their education or whatever it is they're doing. Continue with their jobs while their husbands are at post?

MATLOCK: I'm sure there's justification for it, but I don't, except in extreme circumstances, think it's quite fair. What it usually leads to is a divorce, and I feel that frankly it is just a way of supporting separation.

Q: Rather than going on.

MATLOCK: That it's simply a way to get it done.

Q: All right. Now then you were here and then you went from here to Czechoslovakia? Is that right? Or did you go back? Yes, yes, you did.

MATLOCK: Yes, yes. When we came here in 1981, Jack was at that time Ambassador designate to Czechoslovakia. He had been appointed by President Carter. And then President Carter lost the election. So he was one of two people whom President Reagan picked up to continue with the appointment. But President Reagan asked him to come to Moscow while he decided who he would get as ambassador and then after that Jack would go to Czechoslovakia. So Jack said he would be willing to come, but only if I could come along too. This was for temporary duty and that was a little unusual, but they did agree to let me come also. And it turned out to be a very long time. We thought it might be as long as six weeks so we came with three suitcases each! (laughs) It turned out to be ten months, so it was a long time, but we enjoyed it.

I think probably the most instructive little story in that period was the one about the Fourth of July that I thought you might be interested in hearing about. We decided that since he wasn't the ambassador we should cut the guest list considerably and just have a “coupe de champagne” for about fifteen hundred people here and that it shouldn't be a full-blown Fourth of July reception. So we got busy and got all of the American champagne that we could find in Western Europe flown into Moscow. It was all chilled and waiting.

Someone asked me about the reception the day before and I explained that we were going to have macadamia nuts and champagne and that was all. And she said, “Oh, do you have fifteen hundred champagne glasses at Spaso House?” And I said, “Oh my goodness!” I checked with Clemente, the Italian butler. We had one hundred and three. So, what should I do?

In Moscow what you do is call Stockman's in Helsinki. Stockman's can solve any problem you might have in Africa (laughs) or Moscow. They're wonderful. All you do is call Stockman's. So of course they did have the plastic champagne glasses. Then the problem is, how do you get them to Moscow overnight? Someone remembered that an American was traveling in Scandinavia and would be coming back through Finland by train. So Stockman's sent glasses out to the train, found the person, and asked him if he would be willing to bring them to Moscow. He very nicely said, “Yes.”

So he came back with his compartment loaded with cartons of champagne glasses.

I saw him a few days later and thanked him again and asked if he had enjoyed the reception. He said, “I wasn't invited.” He had been on the list that was cut!

Q: Now I'll take us back to Czechoslovakia. Would you like to speak a few words about your experience in Czechoslovakia as it is such an interesting place today?

MATLOCK: Well especially now with the major changes and Mr. Havel as head of government. One scarcely dared to have a conversation with him back in those days. So

the changes have been momentous. Our experience there in times when things were very closed was positive, but frustrating.

I think probably the most innovative thing that we did was to go around to the different towns and villages that had been liberated by Patton's army during World War II on the dates of liberation and take whole convoys of cars, and have little ceremonies at the markers. In some cases the markers had been taken down so we had the ceremony where the markers had been. And that way we got to see a lot of people because the whole village would turn out.

The first year I made photographs and the second year gave people the photographs and this got to be a very special thing which I hope that Shirley Temple Black continues. I'm sure she will in May when she's there as the Ambassador. We would pre-record Jack's remarks which would come out at night on the Voice of America. This meant that the whole country was aware of the fact that not just the Soviets, but also the Americans had liberated their country.

We did not attend the National Day receptions for the simple reason that the invitation read, “In recognition of the liberation of Czechoslovakia by the Soviet forces.” So Jack every year would explain why we wouldn't go and then the last year we were there, sure enough, it was dropped so we went.

Q: That goes way back to when we were there.

MATLOCK: A long time.

Q: A long, long time ago.

MATLOCK: But the people whom we did get to know were very, very brave people in situations that were very tight and awkward. The palace which is the residence is probably the most extraordinary house in the American Foreign Service. It was bought

by an American Ambassador and then the U.S. government got it for very little because it was part of the reparations for taking over private property of Americans. It's quite an extraordinary place. I remember having been there for a week, deciding to go talk to the cook, and not being able to find the kitchen. (laughs) The basement was divided into two parts and was so enormous that I was walking around in the wrong part.

BuCzechoslovakia was a wonderful post. I felt very guilty because I did not study Czech. My husband had studied it when he was a graduate student at Columbia years ago, and just needed enough instruction to bring it up to the point where he could use it professionally. I decided that if I tried to put the accent on the first syllable, then my Russian would disappear. It was really kind of embarrassing for me to have to use Russian or German to communicate with the wonderful people of Czechoslovakia. But except for that, I found it a very frustrating and also very positive experience. I have gone back and have had wonderful experiences when I've been there again, and I look forward very much to going again now that the government has changed and there's a possibility to put their new democratic powers to use.

Q: It's a very exciting time for you to be here in this position with everything that's going on in Eastern Europe.

MATLOCK: Yes. One of my favorite stories about Eastern Europe was told me by a young Soviet reporter who is a very enterprising young lady who had this idea of publicizing people in this country who had done nice things for other people without pay, (what we'd call volunteer work, but for them it's more like forced labor. It's a matter of, you're told to go out and work twice a year and you do it). These are people who have the goodness of heart to do very nice things for other people. So with her weekly magazine she had this contest. Two of the criteria were that you'd done something very special for other people, and secondly, that you could speak English and did not need an interpreter. So she ended up with ten Soviets on an airplane. It so happened that the Berlin Wall was breached during the time that they were traveling to the United States.

Well they arrived in Seattle and the press was there, and someone of the press said to her, “What do you think about the Wall?” She was leading the group, you know. She said, “Wall, what wall?” And he said, “The Wall in Berlin.” And she said, “Well what about the wall in Berlin?” And he said, “It's been breached. And people are coming across it. What do the Soviet people think of this?” And she said, “Well, I think we have so many problems of our own at home, I can't imagine that we would be concerned that a wall was being torn down in Berlin!”

She said that after she was there for a while, she saw in the newspapers and on TV what a symbol it was, and then she realized why it was so important. But to her as a young woman who is less than thirty and was say around twenty-six or so, now what is the Berlin Wall? It didn't mean anything to her. But now she knows and understands what an important symbol it was. But I think that some of us who feel very strongly about things that happened a couple of generations back should listen to the younger people who know what's going on right now.

Q: And who are doing so much to bring about the change in events. You mentioned briefly the KAL?

MATLOCK: Oh in Czechoslovakia. It happened to be on our thirty-second wedding anniversary that the KAL [plane] was shot down over Sakhalin Island. Jack turned to me at breakfast and he said, “Do you think I should go back?” and I said, “Yes.” At that time he was quietly advising the President on Soviet affairs while he was Ambassador to Czechoslovakia. So he got on the next plane and went back. When he arrived at the meeting at the White House, the Chief of Staff said to him, “Jack you're late.” (laughs) He'd stepped off the plane and gone right into the meeting.

Q: Then you left Czechoslovakia after this?

MATLOCK: Yes, after this there was an article in the New York Times about how Jack Matlock, Ambassador to Czechoslovakia, was the Advisor to the President on Soviet Union Affairs. So then after that disclosure, he went back to become the President's Advisor on European and specifically Soviet Affairs on the National Security Council.

Q: Which must have been an interesting time.

MATLOCK: It was. He had worked briefly with Secretary Haig in the beginning of the Reagan Administration and had agreed with Haig and had attempted to convince the President that what we really needed to do to improve the relationship was a show of strength. So that was why the military was built up. I remember Jack Matlock saying to me, “Okay, we're going to have to tighten our seatbelts for quite a while. But I think it'll get a whole lot better after that.” This was when we were coming here to Moscow, the beginning of the Reagan Administration. And the concept worked.

Q: This was when you came in 1981?

MATLOCK: Yes. And so he's been fortunate after 3 # years when he would stay in contact with the President he was able to be involved in the decision-making process, the policy-making process, that he was really quite fortunate to come back here and try to implement it.

Q: Well he was just the only man for the job, it was just obvious.

MATLOCK: Oh, well.

Q: Yes, I think so.

MATLOCK: Well he was well-prepared, having been here three times before, and then of course knowing a lot of the key people. The tradition here in this country is that when you get a job, you can keep it practically forever. Sort of more European, whereas we leap

about from job to job all the time. It's really confusing to them. I remember someone told me how many Secretaries of the Treasury and how many Secretaries of State there had been, all the time that he was in the same position. It's not nearly as much fun I should think, but it does mean that when, as you know, when you're involved in Soviet Union affairs and you come back, you find that the same people are here. It's not like Washington where you come back and you don't know anybody who lives in your neighborhood.

Q: It's changed so much. How does one ask about the differences in life? You're living in Spaso House now and you were living probably in "Leninsky 45" many years ago.

MATLOCK: Well that's a good question. We were not in "Leninsky 45." We were in "Kutuzovskiy 14" and we watched "Kutuzovskiy 7" complex being built outside our window. We saw the women every morning in their tan jackets, often in the snow, putting the bricks up one by one and building that great huge complex where so many Americans live now.

In '81, I'm sorry, in '61, we went into an apartment which was actually two Soviet apartments put together and our boys were in one kitchen. The kitchen became a very small room with bunk beds. And our daughter and our son, who was born shortly thereafter, were in the same room with the nanny. And we had a bedroom. When the fifth child came along, Joe was relegated in the night to the telephone table in the hall. The nanny, the Austrian governess actually - we had a Russian nanny as well - but the governess would give him a late night feeding. And then I would do the very early morning feeding. But Joe doesn't like to hear about his first five months on the telephone table because we didn't want to sleep with him and she already had two children, and there was no space in the old kitchen with the older boys. He spent the daytime in our bedroom.

So that was the way we lived the first time. So here we are by ourselves in Spaso House with quite a nice apartment. And I particularly love the room we're sitting in, the library which we'll talk about a little bit if you don't mind.

Q: Oh absolutely.

MATLOCK: And five guest rooms and no children.

Q: I'd like to talk about this room and I'd also like to talk about the book that you are writing on this house.

MATLOCK: Well, you'll read a lot about the room when you read the book. You will remember that there was some of the research material included in an article which was excerpted in the Foreign Service Journal recently. But the title of my book, the working title, is Spaso House, Backdrop to History. What I'm doing is using the house like in a play. It's the setting for re-telling the story of the U.S.-Soviet relationship, mainly from the personal point of view rather than too much emphasis on the political. I've tried to dwell on the things that are entertaining and interesting and happy and positive rather than a good deal on the things that were dreadful and horrible.

But as far as this room is concerned, it's certainly seen a lot. Most of the ambassadors considered it their room. In the case of Ambassador Harriman, this was his bedroom and study. During that time, Stalin was working at night which meant that the embassies had to work at night as well. The American Embassy was down next to the National Hotel at that point. Embassy officers would come out to Spaso House to talk with the Ambassador in his robe and slippers that had little turned up toes that people were fascinated by. They would sit in front of the fireplace and discuss cables and Embassy business.

But of course the most historic story of this room was that the Great Seal of the United States was bugged. That was when Ambassador Kennan was here. He has re-written that experience for my book for which I'm very grateful. Apparently it became obvious that from the space which was the Ambassador's study that whatever went on here was being transmitted some way. The question was to find out how. They did all kinds of things to find out where it was. One day Ambassador Kennan had his secretary come in and

pretend to take dictation. He read from an old dispatch of many, many years ago which sounded very official. Meanwhile the technicians went around trying to find from where it was being transmitted.

They realized that it might be in the wall with the Great Seal on the wall behind me here. They started breaking into the wall and didn't find anything. Finally they dismantled the seal and there it was in the beak of the eagle. You hear it was at the Embassy so you think the Chancery, but actually it was here in this room in the residence.

One of the more interesting stories is about the fireplace, not in this room, in the library downstairs. Ambassador Kennan was then young George Kennan, a Foreign Service Officer who spoke Russian. He was the first person actually to see Spaso House. He was given the responsibility of getting it ready for the first ambassador, Ambassador Bullitt. He felt that the library downstairs needed a fireplace. He tried to get one through the Foreign Ministry that was then called Narkomindel. It just didn't happen. The Ambassador was about to arrive. Finally one day Kennan said they cut a hole in the wall and put the fireplace in. It turns out that the fireplace had been taken out of the Foreign Ministry itself so to this day that fireplace directly under this one, which looks just like it, is called the Narkomindel fireplace.

Q: Well didn't they live here in this house at that time?

MATLOCK: Who?

Q: Ambassador Bullitt and George Kennan.

MATLOCK: Yes they did. That's a fascinating story. The Embassy was ready, or appeared to be ready. It was the building next door to the National Hotel overlooking Red Square. Although it appeared to be ready, the Foreign Ministry wouldn't let them move in. So they had to have the Embassy here. And everybody lived here as well. They found out later why it was they weren't allowed to move in. It was where they were building the subway

and the Soviets were afraid that the building might fall in. They weren't absolutely certain that it was safe, so they wouldn't let them move in until they had finished the subway work. But they didn't tell them. They just wouldn't let them move in. Here at Spaso, Bullitt was, as Kennan said, steaming with fury.

Q: Was he here by then?

MATLOCK: He was here and his daughter was here. You know he was married to the widow of John Reed. They were divorced by then, but he had the daughter. And the daughter's comments about Spaso House, she was eleven, are among the more entertaining that I've run across.

Q: How have you done the research for this book?

MATLOCK: Mrs. Bohlen very kindly let her husband's library become part of the Spaso House library. I've basically used the books that are here. I've also used various services of the United States for books that I wanted to use. I've also used what you're doing now, oral history, as much as I could, talking to people who have been here or lived here. Most ambassadors have written memoirs and I've used those up to now.

Most recently a young lady at the Library of Congress helped me with the research in the more recent period for ambassadors who did not write their memoirs. That makes it very difficult to find information I need. I may have to ask to use some of the documents of the State Department, but I'm not so much interested in policy as I am in the personal aspects, not kiss and tell, but interesting stories by and about people who lived in and visited Spaso House. For example, you do know I'm sure from your reading that General Eisenhower was here when World War II ended, here in Spaso House. And you know, in two weeks his granddaughter will be married here.

Q: That's right.

MATLOCK: She's marrying a Soviet space scientist, Roald Sagdeyev. Susan Eisenhower and Roald Sagdeyev are going to be married here at Spaso House! Her father, John Eisenhower, whom I met first when he came with her mother to a meeting thirty years after the meeting of Soviet and American troops at the Elbe River during World War II, and his present wife will be staying with us.

Q: You have had fascinating guests. Would you care to comment on the role of the spouse here in Moscow particularly? How it has changed from the time you first arrived in 1961?

MATLOCK: Well of course it's difficult to generalize. I'm glad you didn't ask about the role of the spouse in general. I'm glad you mentioned Moscow. I'm happy to talk about it from my own personal point of view, but again, everybody's experience is so different that I just hesitate to generalize. When we came in 1961, the women were expected to go to Mrs. McSweeney's coffee once a month and if we didn't happen to make it, then it was commented upon the next time we saw her. She was the wife of the deputy chief of mission. And I think that was good. I enjoyed it. Those were fun meetings, and I wouldn't have missed the opportunity to talk to everyone.

Q: I think we were closer as women, don't you?

MATLOCK: Yes. We were certainly closer than we are now that we have the opportunity of either taking an active part of the activities of the embassy or not. I think it's fine to have choices. Choices are important. I have mentioned I think the calling cards. Calling was expected not only in Vienna which was our first post, but also here in Moscow. It was difficult to get around. You know, get the children looked after, make the calls, and get to know people, but I did think that it was important and I enjoyed it. Of course it was possible because the spouses simply didn't work.I don't believe at that point that we had any tandem couples. I think for many years it was necessary for one of the spouses to resign if both were Foreign Service officers. I knew of one case where the male resigned, but in

most cases it was the female who resigned. By 1974 when we came back to Moscow, we had some of the first tandem spouses.

And I remember one little embarrassing incident. Since I had studied Russian at the Foreign Service Institute with the people who were coming out the year before we came, I knew the people who had studied Russian, but I didn't know their spouses. One of the people looked very much like the spouse of the first tandem spouse of a couple whose parents I knew. When the wife of the person I met at FSI came to call, I told her very brightly that our daughter Nell, who was with us for a while before she entered Duke, had offered to hem her clothes for her if she wanted her to. (laughs)

The look-alike tandem spouse had put a little notice on the bulletin board that she needed someone to take up hems and to do sewing for her. You know, she was trying to handle everything. So I got the two people mixed up (laughs) and she looked quite startled down at her dress and she said, “Well thank you,” or something like that. And I found out after she had gone that it was the wrong person.

Q: The wrong lady. Oh dear. (laughs)

MATLOCK: But by '74 when my husband was deputy chief of mission, the calls were not obligatory. When people asked to call I invited the children to come along as well. It was wonderful, the thing that the Ambassador in Poland and Mrs. Davies were doing at that time. They were inviting everybody new to come in and have potluck supper and the Ambassador would cook spaghetti. That was really special. Although Jack was not the Ambassador, we tried to get to know everyone personally.

I think the traditional relationship of the wife of the DCM to the community was a very, very important one. That was back before we had a CLO, a Community Liaison Officer, and it meant that I was very much in touch with the community. Not only the embassy community, but the wider community as well. One of the wives, Karen Joyce, whose husband is now the Deputy here, came to me one day and said, “Don't you think it would

be nice if we organized the women a little bit to try to have some special interest groups?" We remembered that there had at one point been an American women's organization. We went about the business of trying to make it possible for women to come together by reviving that organization. This was extremely successful.

We had lots of special interest groups. The one that I was most concerned with was the two-year seminar in Russian literature which I coordinated, but we did it ourselves. And then when a visitor would come such as Ambassador Kennan or someone worked at the Embassy who knew the subject we were discussing, we would invite them to be a guest speaker and their reward was dinner with us afterward. Since we had a good Finnish cook, IREX professors and students were happy to conduct our sessions.

During the time we were here, there were a lot of women who had been American originally or had some connection with America, and they all wanted to become part of our group. The group was limited by the number of people who could fit in our living room. That was Americans only because Spaso House was not available to us for meetings. We would have all the meetings at my house because I had a big living room. That was our excuse for not taking in other people to join us.

The wife of the Canadian Ambassador who was Trudy McLean tried to organize the Canadian ladies to do something that was similar because they were having some morale problems. One does in a dark and cold country. She asked me to help her with this, so I went to the organizational meeting and we talked about what we Americans did, and she thought about what was needed to do the same on a wider level internationally. You can imagine my amazement when I came back in 1981 and found that there was an international ladies group going with 500 members! It was patterned on ours and was still using the tapes - we always taped our history and literature seminars. They were still using our reading list and our tapes and everything. The reading groups were recycled over and over again, still going strong, and there were more than twenty special interest groups.

In the meantime, the American women had all wanted to go to work for all kinds of reasons, both economic and psychological. The American women's organization had sort of dwindled to the point it practically didn't exist. Those of us who wanted to belong to a larger group went to the international group, which is still very active now in 1990.

But the interesting thing is now, this American group is being recycled again, and the American women who are here who don't want to belong to the larger group or haven't enough time to go, the few people who are staying home with small children, are forming an American women's organization and they are re-inventing the wheel all over again which is fun. I think when an organization disappears if it's no longer viable, that's great. When it's the time for it, then it'll spring up again. It's really quite fun to see it happening all over again.

Q: Where do the ladies meet who belong to this international group?

MATLOCK: They meet at different residences, and for the very large meetings we go to public spaces. For example March 8th is International Women's Day and we have a huge gathering where each country has a group and talks about their food and has a display and you go around and talk to everybody. That was first at the Chinese Embassy and then last year and this year it was in the Youth Palace hall which has a huge area. They usually have one or two meetings here at Spaso. The first meeting in the fall is here, the organizational meeting. When we have exhibitions in our Spaso gallery or special films or something unusual, we have additional meetings.

Q: You've had a great many visitors while you've been here?

MATLOCK: We've had thousands of people. Within the first ten days we had both Secretary Shultz and the whole Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Representatives. You were here, were you not, for that, right? So it's been like that ever since. We've had a lot of visitors. I think the most important one was President Reagan,

but, leading up to that, Secretary and Mrs. Shultz came five times and it was always a pleasure to have them here. They were just wonderful and very involved people who were right on top of everything.

I guess one of the more entertaining stories from that was the time that we invited a number of people - I think we were going to be 40 around round tables in the small dining room - during the Secretary's visit. The Secretary and Jack and one or two other people who had gone to call on Gorbachev simply didn't come for lunch. It got to be 2 o'clock. We had the wives, we had Mrs. Shevardnadze here, and Mrs. Shultz and all the wives of all these important people along with their husbands, as well as most of the American delegation..

Finally about 3 o'clock we decided, obviously they're having a long meeting, so we'll sit down and eat. We sat at three tables and left the fourth table for them. After we had finished, they appeared. The Secretary's secretary said to me, “I think the Secretary will prefer a sandwich and a glass of milk.” And I said, “I suspect he's hungry enough to eat whatever the rest of us eat.” We went into the dining room and waited while he went upstairs. We waited and waited and waited.

Finally I said to everybody else, “I think you should at least start your soup. He won't mind.” By then it was 4 o'clock. They took one spoonful, the Secretary came bouncing down the steps. He'd had a bit of a nap, he'd had a sandwich and a glass of milk his secretary had arranged for the kitchen to send him, and all of these people leapt up like a school of fish and disappeared for another afternoon of negotiation.

Q: Ah-hah!

MATLOCK: Well the next time they came, since Mrs. Shevardnadze had been kind enough to have Mrs. Shultz twice in their apartment, we wanted to return the hospitality and have them here for lunch. Jack had gone to Helsinki to meet the Secretary on the way to Moscow. I woke up in the middle of the night and realized that I would have to make an

appropriate toast in Russian. My Russian teacher was not coming, Jack was not here, and I had to decide what to do.

I got up in the middle of the night and put my thoughts together and decided, well, I'll say two things, one serious and one flippant, and make it as grammatical as I could. Well as it turned out, she brought with her an interpreter, a man. So we were thirteen at the table, twelve plus the young man. Since I had my toast ready in Russian I decided I was going to use it.

First, I talked about how wonderful it was to see the development of the relationship between Mrs. Shultz and Mrs. Shevardnadze. They obviously became very close. I talked about that theme and widened it a little bit. Then I said that I think we have discovered a technique to keep our husbands from being late to lunch, referring obviously to the day they were so late for lunch. I said we simply didn't invite them! This brought a laugh.

The door opened. There stood the Secretary of State and the Ambassador to the Soviet Union hungry (laughs) because they hadn't been invited to lunch. Well we burst into raucous laughter. I don't think either of them ever understand why that was so funny. My friends accused me of timing everything although it wasn't planned. It couldn't have been better. I said that and there they were.

Q: They came in anyway.

MATLOCK: The nice young man who was translating back into English from my Russian said exactly what I intended to say, so obviously I'd gotten through at least to him. So it makes a story.

But of course the big important event was the visit of the President and there are lots of anecdotes and stories connected with that. I guess it's really difficult to generalize. The preparations for the visit were really quite extraordinary.

They said that we would have to cover all of the windows and I said, “That's just fine provided the window curtains are white.” So overnight, practically, in Washington they whipped up window curtains for the whole house, and they came out on the plane with the President's car which was sent for him to use while he was here. One night I went to bed and there were no curtains and the next morning I woke up and there were white curtains all over the house which lightened and brightened it a lot. We were very grateful to the Reagans for that.

Q: Who put the curtains up?

MATLOCK: I should think our staff. I don't know who did it. You know everybody was working feverishly. One of the things I enjoyed doing was making a tape for international Cable News Network. I led the Soviet announcer through the house and pointed out all the different things that we were doing in preparation for the visit.

The visit itself was orchestrated in the sense that I felt the Reagans always had their toes on the marks. It was like playing a bit part in a soap opera. There was no leeway for personal interaction.

President Reagan is such a warm person that around the edges you always feel that you're communicating. I found it particularly difficult to deal with Mrs. Reagan's Chief of Staff who told me that they wanted the only photographs to be the official photographs. Well I didn't much like that. And I did talk with Howard Baker toward the end of the visit since he is also a photographer. And he said, “Well don't pay any attention to him.” So I stopped paying attention and do have a few photos. I wish I had paid less attention all along. I can see how in a situation that is formal, that is being televised, that obviously you don't want somebody to stick a camera up in the middle of the scene. But I don't see why he would tell me that even in my house I should not use my camera. It would have been interesting to have a few shots that I could have made unobtrusively.

I feel that one of the most important aspects of the visit - one that hasn't been discussed very much but which is important - is the fact that Mrs. Reagan came to the Soviet Union and did her own thing personally and privately. She went to Leningrad, she went to a school, she went to the Tretiakov Gallery. She did a number of things, not, you know, hanging on her husband's arm, but as an individual person.

I felt that this should have made it easier for Mrs. Gorbachev to be able to be a very visible person herself which for some reason journalists in the Soviet Union have denied her. I guess they resent her for doing visible things. Recently, when my husband went to a place called Voitinsk where they make the large missiles, the SS 20's, I decided not to go along because the comment going around town was that obviously Mrs. Gorbachev does not trust her husband because she goes everywhere with him. (laughs)

So I decided that if he was going to go gaze at SS 20's, I wasn't going to be in the background. I'm sorry because I heard from a member of our staff that the Praga Restaurant, which is one of the best restaurants in town, sent not only food but waiters out to cater the dinner, so apparently it was a wonderful event and I missed out on it just because I didn't want to tag along. But I've gotten over that. Now I go along everywhere I think I'd like to go.

Q: And Mrs. Gorbachev is not very visible here?

MATLOCK: Not terribly. She always travels with her husband and when he is shown on TV, she is usually there. She's very active with the Cultural Fund which is fine, but otherwise I don't know. I have heard that she helps with his correspondence. I see her only under very formal circumstances. I guess the least formal situation in which I saw her was when Van Cliburn was here. After the concert there was a private gathering. I had my camera then and used it. I didn't use flash so my photos are not very clear, but I do have photos of Van Cliburn with them.

The Reagan visit I think in general was very successful. One of the funniest, well I shouldn't say funny. One of the - yes, I'll say funny. One of the funniest things was the fact that the cable for television to Spaso House was cut and it was never quite clear by whom or why, but it was cut so we could not see cable television or any kind of TV. The Shultzes, for example, were getting it at their hotel and all their friends were watching it. The Reagans at Spaso were not able to see themselves on television. It seems they were sort of addicted to seeing themselves every night on the evening news and she was beside herself. It was the only thing that she would talk about (laughs). Even at the Kremlin dinner she reproached my husband because she couldn't see television at Spaso. Well, that was kind of a little aside, a little bit of human interest.

Q: Something is bound to happen here. Do you expect to have the Bushes?

MATLOCK: I don't think so. I don't think that we would last that long. Of course President Bush has been here. He's been to a couple of funerals. As a matter of fact, there was a little comment that was made by one of the journalists, kind of irreverent, but I think it's amusing. He said that Vice President Bush's slogan should be, “You die, I fly.” (laughs) So he knows Moscow and I'm sure that. . . Of course the next visit must be to the United States and I can't imagine that we'll still be here when President Bush comes to Moscow for a summit meeting.

We have had a visit from Secretary and Mrs. Baker and expect another one within about two weeks. They're absolutely charming, their techniques of operating are different. Her interests are centered largely around the church and for that reason we had some fascinating conversations with people in the church. I look forward to the next visit. She wants to bring her daughter. I hope she will. She's a young lady who's ten.

Q: Before I wind up, I think it might be interesting to find out if you've had any personal contact, talks with the Gorbachevs.

MATLOCK: Well I'll never forget the first thing that he ever said to me. Jack had met him several times before. He'd been to the all the various conferences and all the summits between Reagan and Gorbachev, but I had never met the General Secretary when he came for the Summit in Washington. I was all prepared with what I was going to say when I met him the first time, which was something to the effect of, “It's very nice to meet you at last, particularly on American soil.” And I had this all in mind ready to say. They got off the plane and Jack introduced me. Gorbachev took me by the hand and looked me in the eyes and said, “It's so very nice to meet you at last, particularly on American soil.” (laughs) The only thing I could think of was, “Da!” (laughs)

But he's a very direct person. You have the feeling he's talking to you and you alone when he's talking with you, which is quite nice. When he came for the meeting last December in New York, I was wearing the coat that Jack had given me for our 40th anniversary which is a white mink coat that he had bought for me in Moscow. And I was all set again with a line that I was going to say. And Mikhail Sergeyevich came off the plane, took one look at me and he said, “I see you've been shopping in Moscow!” (laughs) So it's hard to be really formal with someone who comes across as being so human. And I think that the reason that politically he's done so well is that he's really good with these one-liners and he does make you feel that he's talking to you, is interested in you as an individual person.

Q: Well he shattered us when he jumped out of the car and shook hands in Washington. This was so unexpected.

MATLOCK: Well he and President Reagan were good friends and you may remember. . . Again I refer to the article that was excerpted in the Foreign Service Journal. The editor for “International Life” who asked me to do that article originally said, “I hope that you will begin with a Reagan joke.” I followed the President around waiting for him to say something funny, which he didn't do.

Their last event was here at Spaso. We had all the Americans invited and the chandelier room had at least 6 or 700 people in it. Babes-in-arms, absolutely everybody was packed in there. And we had built a little platform for the President and Mrs. Reagan to stand on. He looked around and said, “You know, if I could have collected a crowd this big in Hollywood, I'd still be there.” (laughs) I had my opening line!

Q: That was wonderful. Thank you so much. This has been simply marvelous having a chance to talk to you.

MATLOCK: Well, thank you for giving me the opportunity. I enjoyed talking to you. I'd like to reverse it and do an oral history with you.

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BIOGRAPHIC DATA

Spouse: Jack F. Matlock

Spouse Entered Service:1956Left Service: Date of your Affiliation:1956Left Service:

Status: Spouse of Ambassador Posts: 1956-58Washington, DC 1958-60Vienna, Austria 1960-61Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany 1961-63Moscow, USSR 1964-67Accra, Ghana 1967-69Zanzibar, Tanzania 1971-74Washington, DC 1974-78Moscow, USSR 1978-80Washington, DC 1981Moscow, USSR 1981-83Prague, Czechoslovakia 1983-86Washington, DC (NSC) 1986-PresentMoscow, USSR

Spouse's Position: Consular Officer, Political Officer, Consul, Deputy Chief of Mission, Diplomat in Residence, Ambassador

Place/Date of birth: December 7, 1928, Manchester, Tennessee

Maiden Name: Rebecca Inez Burrum

Parents (Name, Profession):

Hugh Burrum - High School Principal, later a Methodist Minister

Leona Burrum - Teacher

Schools (Prep, University):

Duke University BA; Graduate Work at Columbia University, Vanderbilt University; FSI

Profession: Teacher, Art Consultant

Date/Place of Marriage: September 2, 1946, Gallatin, Tennessee

Children:

James Graham Matlock

Nell Evelyn Matlock Benton

Hugh Burrum Matlock

David McSwain Matlock

Joseph Franklin Matlock

Volunteer and Paid Positions held:A. At Post - Substitute Teacher; Coordinator for Hospital Assistants (in Africa); School Boards

B. In Washington, D.C. - Teacher, Fairfax County School System; Substitute Teacher, DC Public Schools; President and CEO International Designers Corporatio- Board of Directors, League of Women Voters, Fairfax County; Board of Directors, AAFSW; Chairman for Legislative Liaison

End of interview